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SUBJECT: Guinea's Movement Towards Political Consensus: At a Snail's Pace

REFS: (A) Conakry 1579, (B) Conakry 1617

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. Little has been done to implement the recommendations by Guinea's opposition and majority political parties since they reached consensus on political reforms on October 16. The changes, including an independent electoral commission, would be wide-ranging and could greatly increase transparency and support a more effective democratic process (ref A). However, the "Commission Paritaire" has disbanded without ensuring its recommendations are enacted into law. Without a coherent plan of action, the government is pushing the international community to fill the void, abdicating its responsibility for necessary preparations for improved legislative elections. End Summary.

Signed Document Does Not Represent Final Consensus

12. (SBU) On October 16, representatives from Guinea's majority and opposition political parties signed a series of recommended texts for an electoral commission, party financing, opposition status, and amendment of the electoral code. The document represented the culmination of ongoing political dialogues since 2004 and recent deliberations by the "Commission Paritaire" (ref A). The Commission, created on August 23, was comprised of 12 representatives from opposition parties, 12 representatives from the ruling PUP and allied parties, and five representatives from the administration. It convened from September 8 through October 16. The historic document represented wide-ranging political consensus, particularly on the creation of an independent electoral commission.

13. (SBU) Because of the impending visit by EC Commissioner Louis Michel (ref B) in late October, party representatives told us they felt pressure to reach consensus, fulfilling one of the major criteria to resume EC funding. Opposition party representatives said the pressure was positive, as they believed the PUP and the administration might not have agreed to several of the recommendations had their backs not been against the wall.

14. (SBU) At the same time, the opposition objected to the October 16 document being presented to the EC as a final agreed text. Opposition party leaders, including Sidya Toure, Jean-Marie Dore, and Ousmane Bah have all made public statements about amendments they intend to propose to the October 16 text. These amendments are principally centered on Article 2, clarifying the process of "co-management" of the elections. The opposition leaders all described the document as a step in the right direction, but not one of consensus.

Government Will Meet With Party Leaders, No Date Set

15. (SBU) Opposition party leaders requested a meeting with the Interministerial Committee on Dialogue, chaired by Minister of State for Territorial Administration Moussa Solano, to present their comments and amendments to the text. Solano initially refused to meet with them, reportedly saying, "They signed, they agreed, and it is too late for any objections." Solano planned to use the October 16 document as the basis for a draft bill to be presented to the National Assembly. Our contacts within the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization told us that Solano recognizes the need for sustained dialogue and has now agreed to meet with the party leaders. However, no date has been set.

Commission Views Its Work Completed

16. (SBU) While the document is stuck in a back and forth between the political parties and the government, a new, independent electoral commission cannot be established to oversee the necessary preparations for next June's legislative elections. Since the Commission Paritaire completed its recommendations, it has disbanded. On November 9, Visiting AF/W Desk Officer Deji Okediji and Poloff met with four members of the Commission Paritaire - two from opposition groups UPR and UFR, one from the PUP, and one from a small party allied with the majority party. They detailed days of very difficult negotiations but asserted that their work was complete; it was now up to the government and the National Assembly to take the next steps.

17. (SBU) We encouraged them to take ownership of the entire process and to come back together to exert pressure on their party leaders and the administration to ensure that their work was not wasted.

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The commission representatives agreed that until the recommendations become law, nothing will change. They also said that certain key actors have a vested interest in stalling, so the election countdown expires without reforms being implemented. With positive signs that the EC might release funding, one opposition party representative told Poloff that the pressure no longer exists to force the government's hand. However, they promised to do their part to get the text moving once again.

If You Want Transparent Elections, You Have to Pay

18. (SBU) While the government did present a formal funding proposal to UNDP and the EC, the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization (MATD) has not followed up with the necessary details to engage the process. During the weekly meeting of elections donors on November 8, the UNDP and EC representatives expressed significant frustration with government interlocutors who are either unwilling or unable to produce a plan of action for the elections. Thus far, Guinea has produced a timetable with specific goals listed, but no details on what actions are necessary to meet these objectives, who is tasked with each, and how much they will cost. The UNDP and EC representatives told us the ministry says it cannot complete a plan because it has never used the machines and the automated processes for voter identification that the EC has promised to fund.

19. (SBU) The government has been provided with recommendations by the UNDP electoral expert who conducted a needs assessment for electoral financing, but MATD representatives said they are still "studying" the paper. The EC representative confirmed that although the ministry could not articulate its vision for the electoral process, it has contested the part of funding document that prohibits the purchase of vehicles. The newly appointed director of electoral activities (who served under Solano during the 2003 presidential elections), told the EC rep that in order to be successful, it will need fifty 4x4 vehicles to be purchased for its use. Although the government has said for weeks that it plans to hold a donors conference to detail its election plan, no date has

been set for this either.

Comment

¶10. (SBU) Guinea's preparations for its June 2007 legislative elections are moving forward, but the momentum is definitely in fits and starts. Actors remain in a reactive mode. While the EC is prepared to put forward 7.5 million euros for the election process, the government has not articulated its plan on how it will use these funds to guarantee an improved process. Instead, it is waiting for the donors to take the lead. At the same time, the "consensus" reached between the government and political parties has not translated into any concrete actions. With a tight schedule to meet for the June 2007 elections, Guinea's pace of progress must quicken or it will lose its race toward transparent elections.

MCDONALD